

Dear Representative Luxenberg, Senator Moore, and members of the Housing Committee,

My name is Stephen Poland, and I am a resident of New Haven. I am a high school special education teacher, and proud member of the New Haven Federation of Teachers Local 933 and American Federation of Teachers Connecticut. I am testifying in support of SB 4, without the substitute language removing a rent cap, and with amendments including lowering the rent cap to 2.5% without inflation (which is in line with pre-pandemic rent increases), covering vacancies between tenants, and expanding good cause eviction to cover all tenants.

In late 2021, a long-term relationship I was in with a homeowner came to an end, and I had to search for an apartment for the first time in over a decade. How the times have changed! The rents for vacant apartments had skyrocketed to the degree I could find nothing under \$1500, and oftentimes landlords required prohibitively expensive security deposits and up to two months rent up front. While I was fortunate to be able to stay with friends during my search, it took over **six months** for me to finally find an apartment. In the end, it was only by subletting from a friend who was moving that I was ultimately able to find the apartment I currently live in.

I am happy in my current apartment, but even though I have stable employment as a high school special education teacher, **the rent takes up more than 35% of my income, making me rent-burdened like over 50% of the renters in Connecticut.** What's more, I am extremely worried that when the lease is up in April the rent will go up further, forcing me to move for the third time in the last 16 months. I love the neighborhood I live in, but building relationships takes time. When tenants cannot afford to stay in our homes or can be evicted for no reason, it tears our communities apart. Over the decade I lived as a homeowner, my partner and I paid toward a fixed-rate mortgage that allowed for predictability and stability, and **tenants deserve the same predictability and stability that will make for safer, more prosperous communities.**

As a high school teacher, I have directly witnessed the negative outcomes of rent increases and no-fault evictions on young people in our schools, especially young people with disabilities I work with everyday. I can recall multiple instances, even in just the past year, of extremely bright, engaged students suddenly becoming extremely disengaged academically, chronically truant, and engaging in fights and uncharacteristically disruptive behavior when their families faced eviction. **When we solely value maximal profits for real-estate investors over stable housing for our communities, we are complicit in the cycle of poverty and structural racism that deprives so many young people from the future they deserve.** Passing a 2.5% rent cap and end to no-cause eviction would go a long way toward giving young

people a chance to succeed according to their own capabilities, rather than being forced to bear the burden of an unjust, racist system so landlords can extract more profit.

During the height of the pandemic, we teachers, nurses, and service workers were lauded as “essential workers,” but **the outrageous rent hikes and no-fault evictions many of us have experienced over the last two years tells us that the working people who kept society together are viewed as if we are disposable.** If you truly value our lives and believe we are essential, you will pass the minimal tenant protections of a universal 2.5% cap on rent increases that covers vacancies and an end to no-fault eviction. Without such protections, the state would show that it values the record-breaking profits of real-estate speculators over the working people of Connecticut.

It is not tenants that are driving up rents, but those very real-estate speculators who are entitled to a return on investment when they sell their investment properties, but also want us to subsidize their investment with egregious rent increases. **There is absolutely nothing tenants do to drive up rents,** and yet without any cap on rent we are being forced to pay for the excesses of capital speculation with our wages. **The entire idea that the “market-rate” of property values should be the sole driver of rent prices is an extremist position that encourages housing costs to become totally detached from workers’ wages and actual housing conditions,** and simply favor the abstract speculation of corporate finance. We have seen a massive influx of out-of-state corporate landlords gobbling up properties and driving up rents with record-setting sales, which **funnels workers’ wages out of Connecticut and away from the local businesses that would thrive if we were able to stay in our homes and keep our money in our communities.**

Additionally, how much money does the state of Connecticut spend on homeless services, policing, and incarceration for problems that originate in rent increases, eviction, and the pressures of housing insecurity? **The US Government Accountability Office found “median rent increases of \$100 a month were associated with a 9% increase in homelessness.”**¹ If we are serious about ending homelessness, we cannot keep trying to solve it on a case-by-case basis, or police our way out of it by criminalizing houseless people. We must seek preventative, structural solutions to the problem, and both a 2.5% cap on rent covering vacancies and an end to no-fault eviction are a core part of those structural solutions.

¹ <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-433>

In the end, this is an issue of whether you stand with the working-class people of Connecticut to pass minimal tenant protections that will support stability, safety, and prosperity in our communities, or if you stand for a totally unregulated real-estate industry to gobble up workers' wages and shred our communities for unlimited wealth accumulation.

I strongly support a rent cap, but SB 4 would be stronger with the following changes:

- **The cap should be 2.5 to 3%, without inflation.** This tracks pre-pandemic average rent increases and would be affordable and predictable to tenants. Remember that tenants are also paying more due to inflation without the equity and loans property owners can access.
- **It should cover apartments in between tenants** so landlords can't push out tenants to increase the rent.
- **It should expand good cause eviction protections** to cover all tenants so we have greater stability in their homes.

Sincerely,

Stephen Poland

New Haven